

Franklin Delano Reagan

It is conventional at political conventions for Presidential nominees to align themselves eagerly with the Past Heroes of their parties. Thus there was something audacious, even brilliant, in the way Ronald Reagan ended the 1980 Republican Convention. The hero he chose was — Franklin Roosevelt.

The words Mr. Reagan quoted, denouncing waste in government, came from F.D.R.'s famous 1932 acceptance speech promising a "new deal for the American people." The new Republican nominee knows how effective that speech and campaign were; Ronald Reagan started his political life as a New Deal Democrat. Mr. Reagan also knows how ephemeral the Roosevelt pledges of frugality were. So why recall all that now? There's no end of good reasons.

Citing F.D.R. on frugality suggests that Mr. Reagan has been consistent in his lifelong political philosophy. He may have renounced the Democratic Party. But, as he told Bill Moyers last May, "I have often thought the party changed much more than I did." And if Ronald Reagan casts himself as the latter-day equivalent of Franklin Roosevelt, guess which part Jimmy Carter is meant to play. Finally, most ambitiously, by using F.D.R. as a model, Mr. Reagan suggests that he is not content to be the darling of narrow ideology. On the contrary, he suggests that there will be a tidal change, 1932-like, in the way Americans vote, and that he aspires to lead it.

Moving toward the center was surely the first priority of the convention. Such outreach has always been Chairman Bill Brock's theme; he and others expressed it to the convention. Think, also, of the speeches not made, by people like Phyllis Schlafly whom liberals and moderates love to hate. Room was found on the program for all of Mr. Reagan's primary rivals except arch-conservative Philip Crane. The only way Senator Jesse Helms finally made it to the platform was by threatening to contest the Vice-Presidential nomination.

Is Mr. Reagan the darling of the right? It was hard to divine that from Senator Paul Laxalt's nominating speech, praising the candidate's term as Governor of California as a veritable Great Society of aid for schools, minorities and the handicapped. And Mr. Reagan was anything but ideologically rigid when it came to choosing his running mate. The pursuit of his 1976 adversary, Gerald Ford, demonstrated a clear Reagan

willingness to reach out. So did the ultimate choice of George Bush. So did the effort to kidnap Franklin Roosevelt.

But for all Mr. Reagan's audacity and moderation, what most endures after the convention is a question. Like Henry Kissinger's disappointing speech early in the week, Mr. Reagan's speech gave a passionate recital of America's troubles, and heatedly denounced Jimmy Carter for not solving them. But what does Mr. Reagan propose? To cut taxes and cut government — while increasing defense spending. Those general ideas may be worthy but they do not hold back the nuclear arms race, lower the price of imported oil or chase the Soviets out of Afghanistan.

As an example, recall what Mr. Reagan said Thursday night about Iran: "Incredibly, more than 50 of our fellow Americans have been held captive for over eight months by a dictatorial foreign power that holds us up to ridicule before the world." True enough, but what would he do about it? Bomb Iran flat? Send Ramsey Clark back to Teheran? Mr. Reagan does not say. He denounces Jimmy Carter for practicing "trust-me" government. But so far, about the only alteration Mr. Reagan has proposed is the person to whom the pronoun refers.

Until Mr. Reagan offers more in the way of ideas, the parallel raised by his candidacy is not with Franklin Roosevelt but another Democrat. In his acceptance speech, Mr. Reagan said, "They say that the United States has had its day in the sun; that our nation has passed its zenith . . . My fellow citizens, I utterly reject that view." In his acceptance speech, the other candidate said, "There is a fear that our best years are behind us, but I say to you that our nation's best is still ahead."

Mr. Reagan says "We are going to put an end to the notion that the American taxpayer exists to fund the Federal Government. The Federal Government exists to serve the American people . . ." The other candidate said, "It's time for the people to run the Government, and not the other way around."

Like the other candidate, Mr. Reagan is a former governor. Like the other candidate, Mr. Reagan lacks background in foreign affairs. Like the other candidate, Mr. Reagan has had little experience in Washington. And like the other candidate, his major claim so far seems to be that he can do it better.

Ronald Reagan, meet Jimmy Carter.